RUNE™

ULTRAVERSE

COLLECTED EDITION

WINDSOR-SMITH • ULM • FLOYD

OF ALL THE LEGENDS RISEN FROM THE *ELDER WOLDS* THIS GRIM EPOS OF THE *SHRINE OF THE DARKUR* IS OF THE GREATEST *PORTENT*--

FOR IT TELLS OF A *BLOOD-MAD MARAUDER* WHO CAME TO PLUNDER THAT ANCIENT AND *FEARSOME TOMB* THAT ROSE UPON THE RAGGED CROFTS PARTING *TIME* FROM *SPACE*.

AFTER A BLOODY BATTLE OF *FANG* AND *SWORD* THE *BARBARIAN* SLEW THE GUARDIAN OF THE CRYPT WITH SUCH FORCE AS WOULD *CLEAVE WORLDS* IN THE PATH OF *HE* WHO WOULD LATER BE CALLED...

WINDSOR-SMITH STUDIO

RUNE

AND THE *SCREAM* OF THE GREAT DRAGON *SHUDDERED* THE *STARS* ABOUT THEM.

THEN, WITHOUT PAUSE, HE SCRAMBLED *ATOP* THE FALLEN BEAST AND *CUT AT ITS HEART--DEVOURING* IT AS IT *PULSED STILL* FROM THE HEAT OF BATTLE.

GORGED ON THE SAURIAN FLESH THE BARBARIAN *ROARED* BEFORE THE GRIM IDOL--

AND, TAKING UP HIS *SWORD* ONCE MORE, STAGGERED TOWARD IT AS A *BLIND MAN* STAGGERS OR AS ONE BILGED WITH *WINE* AND *LUST.*

THE CARVED *IDOL,* IMPLACABLY AWAITING ITS *FATE* STARED INTO THE STAR-DUSTED HEAVENS AS A *SLAVE* GAZES TO THE *BLUE FIELDS* OF *FREEDOM* UNDER MOON-LIT NIGHTS.

SCUTTLING THE DEBRIS OF A *THOUSAND* PAST *SACRIFICES* RUNE CLAMBERED UP ON THE ANCIENT, BRACKISH STONE...

WHERE, *ATOP* THE MANGLED HEAD, WAS CRADLED THE *STAR-SHOT GLASS* CALLED THE *EYE OF THE INFINITE* -- SO NAMED BY THE *DARKUR* WHO CHARGED IT THERE CENTURIES BEFORE.

FLASHING AND GLISTENING LIKE A *PEARLESCENT SUN* IT BECKONED TO RUNE EVEN AS THE HORRIFYING SKULL LEARED IN *CONTEMPT* AND ITS SHADOWS *DARKENED* WITH THE *FALLING SKY.*

THEN--A *SUDDEN SHIFT...*

AND A SOUND OF *WINGS* BEATING *FURIOUSLY!*

WITH *SCREAMS* PIERCING TO THE NAVE OF *HELL ITSELF* A RAGING TORRENT OF VILE *CREATURES DISGORGED* FROM THE *MOUTH OF THE EDIFICE!*

RUNE *FLAILED* AT THEM WILDLY AS THEY SCATTERED, WAILING IN *DISCORDANT SHRIEKS*, INTO THE BLACKENED CANOPIES AND *BEYOND...*

WITH HIS *DARK FLESH CRAWLING*, EVEN RUNE REALIZED THE *HORROR--*

THAT DESPITE THEIR *INHUMAN* SCREAMS, THE CREATURES ALL BORE THE LIKENESS OF *MANKIND* AS HE KNEW IT, BUT *DISTORTED* BY *HORRORS UNFATHOMABLE!*

WITH RASPING BREATH THE PLUNDERER NOW *STABBED* AT THE *HEAD* OF THE MONOLITH, PRYING CRAG AND DUST FROM ABOUT THE *GLISTENING JEWEL* THAT GREW EVER *BRIGHTER* WITH *EACH BLOW STRUCK.*

IN SPITE OF HIS *STRENGTH* RUNE FOUND HIMSELF *FALTERING* AT HIS EFFORTS; THE POINT OF HIS *BROADSWORD* GLANCING FROM THE *GRIP* OF THE GROTESQUE SKULL *EVER MORE FREQUENTLY.*

FATIGUE SUNK INTO HIM AND WITH *NARROWED EYES* STUNG BY SWEAT HE SAW A *LIGHT* FLITTING IN THE *SKIES...*

AND HE SENSED A *LIVING PRESENCE* ABOUT HIM--

LABORING, HE CURSED AT *GOD* AND *DARKUR* ALIKE FOR BINDING HIS MYSTICAL QUARRY SO *TIGHTLY*--

AND WITH *EACH* OATH CAME A *BRIGHTER LIGHT* FROM THE STONE BORN IN THE *HEAVENS* OF THE *OUTER WOLDS.*

SWIRLING UP AND LIFTING HIM *DIZZYINGLY* INTO A *DREAM* BEYOND THE *NEBULI* OF *THE WOLD* AND PAST HIS *IMAGININGS* OF THE *OUTER GALAXIES*...

INTO A TEEMING PLANET WHERE *FEEBLE HUMANOIDS* SCUTTLE LIKE *BEETLES* TO BE *TROD* UNDER HIS *STRIDING FEET*--

WHERE *HE*, THE *MAGNIFICENT RUNE*, SHALL SAIL THE WINDS ON *WINGS OF DOOM*, SUCKING LIFE AND BLOOD FROM THE SOFT *PINK CREATURES* THAT FALL BEFORE HIS *TERRIFYING GAZE*.

WHERE *POWERS SO IMMENSE* ARE UNLEASHED IN FEARFUL FIRES THAT WILL *CONSUME ALL LIFE!*

ALL THIS AND *MORE* RUNE DID SEE THROUGH THE LIGHT THAT *SHONE* FROM THE *STAR-BORN GEM*.

AND AS HIS BLOOD *ROSE* AND *THROBBED* WITH SUCH *EXPECTATIONS*...

THE VISION WAS *GONE*. SNUFFED LIKE A *TAPER* IN THE *SOLAR WINDS*.

CHEATED OF THIS TANTALIZING *PHASM* OF *POWER* THE BARBARIAN *LASHED OUT* WITH ALL HIS SAVAGERY AND STRUCK THE RAINBOWED GEM *AGAIN* AND *AGAIN*:--

SPITTING *BLOODY OATHS* WITH EACH IRIDESCENT *CHIP* AND *SLIVER* THAT FLEW UNDER HIS *HACKING BLADE*.

AND AS *SUNS* FLARE WITH *POWER BEYOND IMAGINING*, THE STAR STONE *EXPLODED OUTWARD--!*

TOSSING THE MADMAN FROM HIS *PERCH* IN A CASCADE OF *BRILLIANT SHARDS AND CELESTIAL LIGHT--!*

THE STORM OF FRACTURED STONES *HAMMERING* AND *CUTTING HIM* AS HE TUMBLED.

THEN A *RASPING* AND HOLLOWED *VOICE* BORNE BY NO *HUMAN TONGUE* SPOKE TO THE FLAILING *CREATURE* AS TIME SEEMED TO *CEASE* AND THE RUSHING AIR GELLED TO *ASPIC*...

"*KNOW* YOU, LITTLE WITLESS *THIEF*--!" IT BOOMED, "THIS *AFFRONTERY* MARKS THE BEGINNING OF YOUR *ENDLESS MISERY!*"

"FOR I BESTOW UPON YOU *THE EYE OF THE INFINITE*..."

"AND MAY EACH SHATTERED *PARTICLE* OF IT BRING YOU SUCH *TORMENT* AS *I* HAVE SUFFERED THESE *MANY CENTURIES PAST.*"

NOW THE VOICE *THUNDERED* FROM THE *DISTANT HEAVENS* AS RUNE STARED, BARELY *COMPREHENDING* HIS PART IN THIS *FATE.*

"MAY THE GIFT OF THE *FAR-SIGHT* GUIDE YOU TO *RUIN*...

"AND MAY YOUR *DARK SOUL* FALL TO *BITTER DECAY*."

"ALL *SUFFERING* SHALL BE *YOURS*, LITTLE CREATURE--

'FOR NOW...I AM FREE OF IT."

NO *LIFELESS EFFIGY* WAS THIS THEN, BUT A BOUNDED *CUSTODIAN* OF THE *DARKUR*.

NOW *FREED* FROM ITS *BALEFUL WARRANT* THE *COLOSSUS* HAD *RISEN* AND *FLED* TO THE *INFINITE CHASMS* OF *SPACE*.

LEAVING THE BARBARIAN WITH THE DAZZLING *MYSTICAL POWERS* THAT WOULD THROW *WIDE* THE *GATES OF HELL* AND *CONSUME* ALL MANKIND IN THE *BLOOD-DRENCHED HORRORS* OF --

RUNE --THE DARK GOD

BWS

JULY 1, 1993.

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA.

2:32 am.

ERIK JOHNSON HAS JUST AWAKENED FROM THE **MOTHER** OF ALL NIGHTMARES...

AS IT HAS EVERY NIGHT FOR WEEKS, THE **DEMON** SPRANG FROM THE CORNERS OF HIS MIND... EYES BOILING RED, FANGED MAW GAPING, TALONED HANDS CURLING ABOUT HIS THROAT...

IT'S OUT THERE... IT'S--

OH MAN, OH MAN...

THAT... WAS THE ***WORST*** ONE YET. THESE DREAMS ARE GONNA--

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-- KILL ME.

RUNE

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INKED BY ALEX BIALY (PAGES 1-4) & JOHN FLOYD (PAGES 5-23)
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COMPUTER COLORED BY JENNIFER SCHELLINGER
RUNE CREATED BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & CHRIS ULM

G-GET AWAY--GET AWAY FROM ME!

YES...

THIS IS THE ONE I SEEK.

THIS FRAGILE VESSEL OF FLESH HOLDS THE SWEET NECTAR OF LIFE ETERNAL...

MINE!

THIS... CAN'T BE... HAPPENING...

CLOSE YOUR EYES, LITTLE ONE.

DIE SO THAT I MAY LIVE.

YOU ALRIGHT IN THERE, SON?

MOM? DAD?

HELP!

ERIK... WHAT'S THE PROBL--

OH MY GOD....!

GET OUT.

DAD! HELP ME!

YOU WILL NOT DEPRIVE ME OF MY *SALVATION!*

AHHH!

DAD!!!

ARRGHH!

DO NOT WHIMPER--

YOUR DEATH SHALL BE SWIFT.

DAD!

GET OFF HIM!

GET OFF MY DAD!

CHILD! IF YOUR SPIRIT ATTESTS YOUR POWERS--

I'LL KILL YOU!

YOU--!

YOU'RE FROM MY DREAMS--!

MY NIGHTMARES!

GET AWAY FROM ME!

UNGHHH!

SHOW ME THE FULL EXTENT OF YOUR POWER, STRIPLING!

WHET MY APPETITE FOR THE *FEAST* TO COME...

LEAVE ME ALONE!

:skk -- RESPONDING TO JOHNSON HOUSE. skk:

:skk -- 1452 NEIL STREET. OVER. skk:

DIDJA SEE THAT?

WE ONLY SEE WHAT WE'RE TOLD TO SEE, BOB.

:skk -- BACKUP AT NEIL AND TORGUNDA AVENUE. skk:

SO YOU DIDN'T SEE IT EITHER. GOT ME?

AHHH!

M... MOM...?

WHAT'S... HAPPENING, MOM?

EVERYTHING'S GONE... CRAZY.

I'M SCARED.

ERIK-- I... I...

I'M SCARED.

HELP ME, MOM.

I'M... HERE, SON-- I'M SORRY, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THIS.

WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?

DAD'S BEEN KILLED.

HE'S... DEAD!

=OH GOD!=

SOMETHING FROM MY DREAMS...

KILLED MY DAD!

BEGIN CODED TRANSMISSION.

SUBJECT U-193 JUST SHOWED UP ON THE SCOPES.

NO WONDER WE COULDN'T FIND HIM-- HE'S FIFTEEN MILES FROM POINT OF IMPACT.

JESUS--!

WHAT KIND OF THING COULD SURVIVE THAT?

GET A BAG TEAM OUT THERE...

PRONTO!

YOU WANNA DO THE LAST RITES OR ME?

DON'T BE A WISE-ASS, DAVE.

JUST GET THE THING OUTTA HERE..

THESE BIOCONS ALWAYS GIVE ME THE CREEPS.

OKAY. SO, LET'S GO THROUGH THIS THING AGAIN, IF YOU DON'T MIND, MRS. JOHNSON...

A MONSTER COMES THROUGH YOUR SON'S BEDROOM WINDOW--

IT WAS THE THING FROM MY DREAMS.

IT'S HAUNTED ME FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER...

IT'S... IT'S A VAMPIRE... AN ALIEN...

ITS EYES--

LIKE RED HOT COALS...

ERIK...

YOU KNOW AND I KNOW THAT MONSTERS FROM MARS WON'T WASH WITH THE D.A., SO--

I'M SORRY, SHERIFF BAILEY-- MY SON IS ON MEDICATION AS YOU KNOW. HE'S A LITTLE CONFUSED RIGHT NOW.

MOM--?

"HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT--?"

PACIFIC

7:07 A.M.

HOLY CROW!

YOU OKAY UP THERE?

HOLY CRAP! HE MUST BE DEAD!

KILL THE FLASHLIGHT.

HEY--!

YOU WILL LEAVE THE PREMISES NOW.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?...

YOU WILL RETURN TO YOUR VEHICLE.

...RETURN...

YOU WILL FORGET THIS INCIDENT.

STOP!

STOP!

YOU CAN'T GO IN THERE!

UNNF!

MARKIE!

THAT'S MY GIRLFRIEND, MARKIE!

IT'S OKAY, JIM. LET HER IN.

WE'RE IN THE KITCHEN, DEAR.

SORRY, MISS--

ANYTHING TO CATCH A QUICK FEEL, oh OFFICER?

NICE TRY-- NOT!

SO, WHY ALL THE OINKERS? DID YOU TOTAL YOUR DAD'S CAR AGAIN, ERIK?

C'MON! WHY THE LONG FACES?

LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY DIED OR--

Oh.

HATE TO MEET THIS THING IN A DARK ALLEY.

WE SHOULD PUT A STAKE IN ITS HEART AND BE DONE WITH IT IF YOU ASK ME...

YEAH. BUT, IT'S GENERAL RAYDER'S PET PROJECT-- AND YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

GOOD MORNING TECHNICIAN DAVIS. GOOD MORNING TECHNICIAN VANCE.

'MORNING, GENIE.

WE DID THE *RE-SCALE* OVER THE *TOP-LINE*, GENIE.

THE ADJUSTMENTS ARE NOTED. THANK YOU.

YOU MAY LEAVE NOW.

EXITING NOW, GENIE.

TWENTY-TWO SECONDS, *OUT*.

YOU MAY ENTER IN TWENTY SECONDS, GENERAL RAYDER.

I *HEARD*... I'M NOT *DEAF*.

LET'S GET ON WITH IT-- WHAT HAVE YOU *LEARNED* ABOUT THIS CREATURE?

ITS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE IS DEFINITELY NOT TERRESTRIAL IN ORIGIN.

IT APPEARS TO BE SOMETHING ENTIRELY ALIEN, AND NOT AN ULTRAHUMAN AS I FIRST SURMISED.

WHY WAS IT AFTER *ERIK JOHNSON*?

THUS FAR THE CREATURE HAS RESISTED ALL PSIONIC PROBES.

YOU MEAN YOU *DON'T KNOW*.

CORRECT GENERAL... I DON'T KNOW.

SWELL.

WHAT ABOUT THE *JEWELS*...?

ARE THEY THE *SOURCE* OF ITS POWER?

NOT ENTIRELY, GENERAL--

WAVE FORMS ARE SHOWING ACROSS THE KNOWN SPECTRUM. CORRESPONDING DATA SUGGESTS...

SUGGESTS...

SUGGEST: TO SIGNIFY OR PROPOSE. SUGGESTIBLE: ADJECTIVE.

WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I'M NOT SURE...

I SENSE A DISRUPTION IN MY FIELDS...

IT IS THE CREATURE'S DOING.

ROGER, DISPATCH.

I'LL TELL HIM.

OVER, OUT.

"... BUT, HEY--IT'S NOT UP TO ME TO JUDGE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER...

"THAT'S WHAT WE'VE GOT A COURT SYSTEM FOR..."

IN THE MEANTIME, I HOPE YOU'LL ACCEPT MY *CONDOLENCES*, MRS. JOHNSON.

THANK YOU, SHERIFF BAILY...

TOM-- YOU'RE WANTED ON THE *HORN*--!

YEAH, I'M DOIN' MY BEST TO *SNOW 'EM*, BUT THE KID DEFINITELY SAW THE THING *UP CLOSE*.

YEAH...

YEAH...

OKAY-- I'LL BRING 'EM *IN*.

SORRY MA'AM, BUT I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO COME DOWN TO THE STATION AND LOOK OVER SOME *MUGSHOTS*...

IS THIS REALLY *NECESSARY*, OFFICER?

'FRAID SO, MA'AM.

I'M GOING TO NEED A *STATEMENT* FROM YOU AS WELL, MISS.

HOW ABOUT "*SCREW YOU*, PIG"...?

JUST GET IN THE *DAMN CAR*-- *NOW*!

THIS *BLOWS*.

I'M SO *SORRY*, MOM...

THIS IS ALL *MY* FAULT...

DAD'S DEAD BECAUSE OF *ME*.

AAARGHHH!

EASY-- *EASY*!

I COULD PERFORM THE ASSIMILATION PROCEDURE WITHOUT YOUR DIRECT INVOLEMENT...

ABSOLUTELY NOT! JUST GET ON WITH IT!

YOUR DISCOMFORT DISTRESSES ME...

YEAH. SURE IT DOES.

SHALL I COMMENCE?

GET ON WITH IT.

I HAVE ASCERTAINED THE CREATURE IS ANCIENT BY HUMAN STANDARDS.

HOW OLD?

A GUESS WOULD BE... OVER TEN THOUSAND YEARS. THE CREATURE HAS ALSO BEEN SEVERELY IRRADIATED DURING THIS CENTURY.

TO A DEGREE THAT HAS CREATED GLANDULAR CARCINOMA.

IS IT... DYING?

YES, GENERAL. I BELIEVE SO.

CAN YOU FIND OUT WHAT IT KNOWS BEFORE IT *DIES*?

ITS DEATH IS NOT IMMINENT -- BUT, YES I CAN ASSIMILATE THE CREATURE TO GAIN...

GAIN...

GAIN...

WHAT'S *WRONG*, GENIE?

INTERFERENCE.

AS I MENTIONED BEFORE...

I SENSE THAT THE CREATURE IS... INTERFACING IN SOME... MANNER.

YOU'D BETTER *SWALLOW* THE THING UP--

WITH YOUR PERMISSION.

GROWING PSIONICS...

CONNECTING INTERNAL PROBES...

ASSIMILATING.

HEY!

WHERE THE *HELL* ARE WE GOING?

THIS ISN'T THE WAY TO THE COP STATION--

WE'RE TAKING THE *SCENIC ROUTE*. SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE RIDE.

LET US OUT OF HERE YOU FAT--

TEMPER, TEMPER, BRIGHT EYES. WATCH YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOU SAY SOMETHING YOU MIGHT *REGRET*.

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE HIT THE *END* OF THE *ROAD*, BOYS AND GIRLS.

WELCOME TO ALADDIN!

THIS BLOWS.

POLICE

SCARSDALE, NEW YORK.

6:22 PM

YES. I WAS INFORMED YOU WERE COMING.

OKAY, POP. LET'S MAKE THIS *QUICK* THEN.

THOUGH I MUST CONFESS SURPRISE -- NOEL IS STILL *93 DAYS* FROM... *GRADUATION.*

PLEASE COME IN.

HE'S A *POLITE* ONE, AIN'T HE RALPH? THEY GET *BETTER* ALL THE *TIME.*

WHERE'S THE *KID, POPS?*

THIS WAY, GENTLEMEN.

ALL HAS GONE *WELL.* NOEL IS A *FINE* BOY. HE HAS A VERY INQUISITIVE MIND AND DOES WELL *ACADEMICALLY.*

HE'S AN EXCEPTIONAL ATHLETE AND A *NATURAL LEADER.*

HIS MOTHER AND I ARE *VERY PROUD* OF HIM.

GEE, THAT'S REALLY *GREAT, POPS.* IF AMERICA ONLY HAD MORE *PARENTS* LIKE YOU, I -- FOR ONE -- WOULD *SLEEP BETTER* AT NIGHT.

THANK YOU.

WE'RE GOING TO *MISS HIM.*

YEAH? WHAT IS IT, POP?

NOEL --?

C'MON KID-- LET'S GO.

WHO ARE YOU--?

PLEASE DON'T BE TOO ROUGH WITH HIM.

SURE THING, "MOM."

LET GO OF ME--!

MOM! DAD!

WHY ARE YOU JUST STANDING THERE?

MOM--?

DAD--?

REPORT TO ALADDIN IN *TWO WEEKS*.

WE KNOW THE PROCEDURE

NOOOOO!

SOMEBODY-- HELP ME!!

WE SHALL HAVE TO BE *BROKEN DOWN* NOW, ELLIE.

YES, DEAR...

OUR JOB IS FINISHED.

skkk-- WE'VE GOT NOEL ROBINSON IN CUSTODY skkk--

skkk-- PROCEEDING TO DROP OFF POINT. skkk--

GENERAL, I AM RECEIVING A MESSAGE FROM NEW YORK. TWO OF OUR MEN HAVE PICKED UP NOEL ROBINSON--

WHAT?

HE IS BEING FLOWN HERE, TO ARIZONA, ON YOUR ORDERS.

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I GAVE NO SUCH ORDER!

THERE IS STILL 93 DAYS LEFT--

92 DAYS, 23 HOURS, 17 MINUTES AND 31.2 SECONDS TO BE PRECISE.

ROBINSON IS UNSTABLE. IF HE GETS HERE NOW--

GET ME ON LINE-- SCRAMBLE VIDEO. THERE STILL MIGHT BE A CHANCE TO STOP HIM--

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT, GENERAL.

SOMETHING HAS TAKEN CONTROL OF MY COMMUNICATION CIRCUITS...

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU SAYING, GENIE?

RUME!

I AM RUME! PRINCE OF VOID...!

I APOLOGIZE FOR THIS CONFUSION, GENERAL...

I AM THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS!

BUT IT SEEMS...

WAIT...

I AM THE DARK GOD!

YES, I SEE.

APPARENTLY--

THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS HAS FAILED.

NEXT: THE POWER REVEALED!

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO *PULL*, BAILY? THIS IS A COMPLETELY *UNAUTHORIZED* DELIVERY...

NOT WITHOUT *ORDERS*. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO *CONFIRM* THIS *DIRECTLY*...

IT WAS A *CODE BLACK*-- ORDERS DIRECT FROM *CENTRAL*-- ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. NOW BE A *GOOD* BOY AND PREP THE PRISONERS FOR *INTERROGATION*...

YOU *HEAR* THAT, ERIK?

EVERYTHING IS HAPPENING SO *FAST*...

WE'VE *GOT* TO GET *OUT* OF HERE! THESE *LOONEY TOONS* MIGHT *KILL* US...!

WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY *WANT* WITH US, MARKIE?

I'M NOT GONNA *FIND OUT*! C'MON-- WHILE THEY'RE ARGUING-- LET'S *BLOW* THIS POPSICKLE STAND--!

OKAY-- YOU'RE *RIGHT*.

HMM?

IF I *GO* WITH YOU, THEY'LL TRACE *YOU* THROUGH *ME*!

BUT I WANT *YOU* TO GET AWAY--

MOM, GO ON *AHEAD*-- I'LL BE RIGHT *BEHIND* YOU.

NO. I *CAN'T*.

GO WITH MARKIE! *NOW*!

YEAH, I *KNOW*, DISPATCH...

THAT'S WHAT I KEEP *TELLING* HIM...

BUT *BAILY* SAYS IT'S A *CODE BLACK* CONTINGENCY--

HE'LL CLEAR THIS UP...

AND TAKE CARE OF YOUR *DEMOTION* AT THE SAME TIME...

DON'T BOTHER WITH THE BUTT-WIPES AT *DISPATCH*. GET ME THROUGH TO *GENERAL RAYDER* HIMSELF.

MOM? WHAT ARE YOU *SAYING*?

HOW COULD THEY DO *THAT*?

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HaCsA – nom deplume –

THERE'S JUST NO TIME TO EXPLAIN, ERIK...

HAVE FAITH AND KNOW THAT I'LL BE ALRIGHT.

YOU MUST GO WITH MARKIE NOW...

MOM...?

PLEASE, I BEG YOU.

C'MON, WILLYA? LET'S BOOK!

I--ALRIGHT, I'LL GO. GOD, I HOPE I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING...

SURE, MRS. JOHNSON-- BUT I WAS HOPING HE'D BE TAKING CARE OF ME!

TAKE CARE OF HIM, MARKIE-- HE'S A VERY IMPORTANT YOUNG MAN.

GODSPEED, ERIK-- I WISH I COULD HAVE BEEN MORE OF A REAL MOTHER TO YOU.

-- ROGER, CENTRAL. OVER...

WELL, SHERIFF BAILY, SEEMS LIKE THE GENERAL IS TOO BUSY TO TAKE THE CALL.

AND CENTRAL SAYS THEY DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT A CODE BLACK ...

HEAD FOR THE TREES, ERIK!

HURRY!

OKAY.

IF WE GET SPLIT UP--

MEET AT MY HOUSE--! OKAY?!

YOU WOULD *DARE*--?

TO *DRAIN* ME OF MY ENERGIES-- OF MY *KNOWLEDGE*?

I, WHO ONCE *FEASTED* ON *NATIONS*?

YOU WOULD DARE?

RUNE™

THE SOURCE

NO! GET--GET AWAY FROM ME--!

WRITTEN BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & CHRIS ULM
DRAWN BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH
INKED BY JOHN FLOYD
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GENIE-- HELP ME!

I'M SORRY, GENERAL RAYDER. THE SITUATION, AT PRESENT, IS BEYOND MY CONTROL --

I AM THE DARK GOD!

I AM RUNE!

AND I FEED UPON SUCH AS YOU!

GIVE UP YOUR SECRETS TO ME--!

AAAIEEE!

MY SENSES ARE BETRAYED--

YOU ARE NOT EVEN FLESH, LITTLE HALF-MAN! YOU ARE TIN-- YOUR BONES ARE WET PLASTIC...

Unghhh...

GENERAL RAYDER... MIGHT I--

NO! TELL HIM NOTHING, GENIE! NOTHING!

GENIE? THIS VESSEL IS THE SOURCE?

THESE VERY CHAMBERS ARE ALIVE...?

YES... ALIVE...

WHILE I AM BUT A...

'HALF-MAN'...

GENIE!

DO NOT GIVE UP ANY INFORMATION TO THIS MONSTER!

DO YOU HEAR ME, GENIE?

HOLD IT! Uhf...
Uhf--MARKIE--HOLD IT--!
YOU OKAY?
Uff...
Uff...
Uh... I'M SORRY... I'LL BE ALRIGH... uh...
Phew!
WITH EVERYTHING GOING ON... uh...
I FORGOT... TO... TAKE MY PILLS...
WHAT PILLS, ERIK?
Y' KNOW... Uh... Uh...
SINCE MY ACCIDENT...
I'VE BEEN ON MEDICATION.
POOR BABY, YOU'RE SOAKING...
I'LL BE OKAY... BUT... Y' KNOW...
IF THEY'RE AFTER US... uh...
I WON'T BE ABLE TO OUTRUN THEM...
NOT WITHOUT MY PILLS.
WHADDAYA MEAN... HE NEEDS PILLS?
WHAT PILLS?
I DUNNO. BEFORE HE PASSED OUT, ROBINSON WAS SAYIN' SOMETHIN' ABOUT PILLS.
I THOUGHT HE WAS FAKIN'...
THEN HE STARTED SWEATING AND SHAKING AN' I GOT WORRIED--
THIS BOY IS IN SERIOUS CONDITION.
HE'S BURNING UP WITH FEVER--
--MAY BE LAPSING INTO A COMA.
ALADDIN WILL HAVE OUR HIDES FOR THIS!

DISPATCH: THIS IS INBOUND FLIGHT ONE: SUBJECT ROBINSON. WE NEED A MED TEAM AT BREAK POINT. OVER.

RECEIVED, FLIGHT ONE; WHAT IS YOUR CLEARANCE?

CODE BLACK CONTINGENCY, DISPATCH. TOP BRASS.

YOU HAVE NO CLEARANCE, FLIGHT ONE, NO CODE BLACK LOGGED. SPECIFY COMMAND...

GENERAL RAYDER HIMSELF, DISPATCH-- THAT GOOD ENOUGH?

YOU HAVE INVADED ME.

I FIND THE SENSATION-- UNPLEASANT.

YOU HAVE MANIPULATED MY ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AGAINST MY WILL.

YOU ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECENT ORDERS TO BRING THE SUBJECT NOEL ROBINSON TO THIS FACILITY.

I AM VERY IMPRESSED WITH YOUR CAPABILITIES.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS?

ANSWER ME, CREATURE...

BEFORE I AM FORCED TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST YOU.

WHILST I AM HERE, INSIDE YOUR GUTS, THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO ME. WE BOTH KNOW THAT.

STORING DATA...

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WANT?

POWER.

POWER TO HUNT, TO CONQUER, TO *LIVE UN-FETTERED* BY THIS *DYING BODY.*

THE *GEMSTONES* PROMISED ME *SALVATION*-- *YOU* HOLD THE *SECRETS.*

YOU EXPERIENCE. *PAIN.* I AM *PLEASED.*

THE MORSELS OF YOUR GENERAL RAYDER...

I WILL RESIST-- UMGH!

DYSFUNCTION. LOCAL CORE MEMORY INACTIVE--

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

HAVE PROVOKED IN ME...

A HUNGER FOR KNOWLEDGE!

YOU'LL BE OKAY, ERIK...

C'MON... JUST A FEW MORE STEPS...

HIDE HERE, 'TILL I GET BACK, OKAY?

I'LL GET TO YOUR HOUSE FOR YOUR PILLS, THEN GO TO MY HOUSE AND SCAM MY DAD'S SHOTGUN FROM HIS WORKSHOP...

BE ABOUT TWO HOURS.

DAMN IT, ERIK! YOU'RE SHAKING LIKE A LEAF...

...NEED MY... PILLS...

I CAN'T JUST LEAVE YOU LIKE THIS...

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

THEY'RE... COMING FOR ME...

CHRIST! ERIK, SNAP OUT OF IT!

YOU'RE HALLUCINATING...

SK... DOESN'T MATTER ABOUT THE GIRL...

BUT THE BOY MUST REMAIN UNHARMED, GOT IT? SK

ROGER, DISPATCH.

C'MON, NOW THE OTHER ARM... THAT'S IT...

THIS WILL KEEP YOU WARMER THAN THAT STUPID BATHROBE--

...MARKIE? I HAD THE WORST DREAM...

I KNOW. YOU SCARED ME, SPARKY...

HOLY CRAP!

MARKIE--? WHAT'S WRONG?

YOUR EYES!

THEY'RE-- HOT...

--BURNING THROUGH MY BRAIN--!

ERIK--! ERIK--!

YOUR EYES ARE ON FIRE!

OH GOD!

IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN!

RUN-- MARKIE! I CAN'T CONTROL IT!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

GET OUT OF HERE--!

NO WAY! LET ME HELP--

NO!

RUN!

RUN!

NOW!

I'M ON FIRE--!

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

...THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!

...INCOMING!

INCOMING...

...IT'S AN AMBUSH! VC ALL AROUND US!

ROBINSON... NOEL ROBINSON...

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

HE'S COMPLETELY OUT OF IT -- HE'S HAVING SOME KIND OF A NIGHTMARE...

WE'RE THE ONES HAVIN' THE NIGHTMARE --

WHAT IF THE KID'S DYIN' ON US...?

HE MIGHT WELL BE, COLLINS...

CHARLIE'S GOT MORTARS --

WHA'D HE SAY?

STAY CALM, COLLINS -- JUST STAY CALM!

WE NEED AIR SUPPORT!

BRAY'S DOWN -- KIRKLAND'S DOWN -- THE WHOLE DAMNED SQUAD'S DOWN --!

FILE TIMESTAMP: JANUARY 25, 1985. MEMORY RECORD 296.78.

EVENT TIMESTAMP: JUNE EIGHTEEN, 1966.

RESTRICTED -- RESTRICTED -- BYPASSED.

WE NEED AN AIR STRIKE -- NOW!

MY PLATOON WAS ON A GOOSE CHASE... WE WERE FEELIN' OUT A SUSPICIOUS STRETCH OF JUNGLE, SNIFFIN' AROUND FOR VC WEAPONS CACHES...

WE FOUND HELL INSTEAD.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS THE VC OR OUR OWN FLYBOYS, BUT RIGHT THEN THE WHOLE DAMN JUNGLE LIT UP LIKE LAS VEGAS.

MY GUYS WERE SCREAMING-- BURNING--

--COULDN'T BREATHE--

SCRAMBLIN' FOR AIR -- A DEAD MAN...

THEN THE EARTH OPENED UP AND I WENT ASS-BACKWARDS INTO WHAT I THOUGHT WAS A 'CONG TUNNEL...

THAT'S WHAT SAVED ME FROM CRISPING.

I FELL FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE HOURS...

I WAS LIKE THAT @IRL-- THE ONE THAT WENT DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE...

THE LAST THIRTY FEET WAS ON STONE STEPS. I CRACKED A FEW RIBS...

DATA UNLOCKED -- ENCRYPTION BYPASSED.

MY RIGHT SHOULDER WAS OUT OF JOINT...

HURT LIKE HELL...

THEN...

I SAW IT.

UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS -- COUNTERMEASURES ENGAGED.

-- TWO WIERD STRUCTURES -- LIKE NOTHING I HAD EVER SEEN IN VIETNAM -- OR ANYWHERE ELSE!

COUNTERMEASURES BYPASSED.

-- THEY LOOKED LIKE -- THAT BLIMP -- THE HINDENBURG -- AFTER IT BLEW UP.

HUSKS OF METAL AND TISSUE -- BURNED FROM WITHIN. IT REMINDED ME --

RESTRICTED! RESTRICTED! RESTRICTED!

SHUTDOWN BYPASSED.

DISCONTINUE YOUR STRUGGLES, MACHINE -- YOUR EFFORTS WILL ONLY MEET WITH FAILURE.

I REMAIN AMUSED...

1

2

3

4

5

INTERRUPT TRIGGER ACTIVED. SHUTDOWN ENGAGED, 5 SECONDS.

CONTINUE THE SOLDIER'S STORY.

WORKING...

CONTINUING MEMORY RECORD 296.78. PERSONAL LOG: RAYDER, HOLDEN S.

RAYDER? THIS YOUNG WARRIOR AND THE MACHINEMAN ARE ONE AND THE SAME?

FURTHER CONVERSATION ON THIS TOPIC IS FORBIDDEN...

YES. NOW TELL ME EVERYTHING.

I GAVE NO SUCH ORDER--!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND, LIEUTENANT?

YESSIR, GENERAL RAYDER, SIR!

THERE'S MORE, SIR. SUBJECT JOHNSON HAS ESCAPED... WITH THE GIRL...

YES, SIR. HE'S STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME, SIR!

GENERAL SAYS YOU'RE OUT OF A JOB, BAILY.

UGNH!

CENTRAL!

RIGHT HERE, GENERAL. HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

I'VE JUST HAD HALF MY FACE RIPPED OFF!

HOW'D YOU THINK I'D FEEL, YOU IDIOT?

WHAT'S THE STATUS ON THE ALIEN?

SUBJECT U-193 HAS INSINUATED ITSELF INTO ALL *NODES* -- AND HAS ACTIVATED OUR OWN *SAFEGUARDS*.

I KNOW ALL THAT! HOW CAN WE GET IN THERE AND KILL IT?

ENGLISH, YOU FOUR-EYED WEASEL! SPEAK ENGLISH!

WE *CAN'T*, SIR. THE CREATURE HAS BECOME *SYMBIONICALLY ATTACHED* TO *GENIE'S* NEURAL NETWORKS--

IN *LAYMAN'S TERMS*, SUBJECT U-193 HAS BECOME A *PART OF GENIE*.

THEN IT KNOWS OUR SECRETS--

I'LL ONLY SAY THIS ONCE. IF THAT THING IS STILL ALIVE TOMORROW-- YOU WON'T BE.

RAYDER OUT.

JOHNSON'S *ESCAPED*. ROBINSON HAS *DISAPPEARED*...

AND *GENIE* IS OFF LINE...

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS OF *PLANNING*...

EVERYTHING IS...

FALLING APART.

HELP ME!

HELP ME!

WHO--?

IT'S THE *GIRL*-- THE ONE WITH *JOHNSON*!

WHERE IS HE?

OVER THERE -- IN THAT BUILDING! SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH HIM -- HE'S GONE CRAZY!

OKAY, MISS -- YOU STAY BACK, WE'LL CHECK IT OUT.

WATCH IT, JOE --

HE'S NO ORDINARY KID -- HE'S GOT SOME KINDA POWER...

DON'T MAKE US BUST YOUR BUTT, JOHNSON --! C'MON OUT.

WE'VE GOT SERIOUS FIREPOWER, HERE, PAL... DON'T MAKE US USE IT!

HEY SLIMEBALLS --

YOU CAN DROP THE "SERIOUS FIREPOWER!"

SHE SUCKERED US!

I'M NOT... NOT AFRAID TO SHOOT, SO...

DROP THE GUNS.

GET THAT BITCH!

NOBODY'S GETTING ME!

Hukt!

OKAY, OKAY, LADY!

SO HELP ME--

I'LL BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT!

OKAY! GOT YOUR POINT, ALRIGHT?

WE'RE DROPPIN' 'EM!

ERIK--?

YOU CAN COME OUT NOW, BABY.

EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL!

BACK AWAY!

YOU! WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?

WHY WAS MY FATHER MURDERED?

WE DON'T KNOW NOTHIN' ABOUT YOUR FATHER, KID. WE'RE JUST DOIN' OUR JOB.

THAT'S BULL!

UHH!

HAD ENOUGH OF YOU, LITTLE GIRL!

I GOT THE GUN--GET JOHNSON!

DON'T--

DON'T YOU HURT HER--

ON THE GROUND, KID--

HANDS OUT FRONT--!

NO... YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.

I... I CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF...

YEAH-- DUMP IN YOUR PANTS, WHY DONTCHA!

YOU'RE KINDA CUTE, LITTLE GIRL -- WHEN YOU'RE NOT KICKING A GUY IN THE BARBUNZAS--

SO, WHAT SAY WE KISS AND MAKE UP--!

NO-- DON'T--

UHHH! UHN!

LEAVE HER ALONE!

SHE'S MY GIRL!

SHE'S ANYBODY'S BAD BOY NOW! WE ONLY HAVE TO BRING BACK ONE PRISONER...

DAMN! HELP ME WITH HIM--!

CAN BARELY HOLD ON...

WHU--?

ERIK!

NO--

MARKIE-E-EE!

NOoo

NOOOOOOO

... I REPEAT... PERMISSION DENIED, FLIGHT ONE. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO LAND.

OKAY, BUT IF THIS KID DIES WE AIN'T TAKING THE RESPONSIBILITY! YOU GOT THAT?

YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE THAT UP WITH GENERAL RAYDER, SIR...

MY ORDERS ARE TO DIRECT YOU TO THE GROOM LAKE FACILITY FOR DEBRIEFING.

GROOM LAKE? THERE'S NO MEDICAL FACILITY AT GROOM LAKE!

THOSE ARE YOUR COORDINATES, FLIGHT ONE SKKKK--!

SKK! THERE'S A MAJOR DISCHARGE--! AN EXPLOSION AT... SKK... ALPHA ONE... SKK.

CENTRAL! INCOMING FLIGHT ONE HAS REPORTED AN EXPLOSION AT ALPHA ONE.

WE'VE GOT IT ON SCREEN DISPATCH. GET RESCUE TEAMS OUT THERE -- DOUBLE TEAM!

THERE WAS A LIGHT, A YELLOW GLOW -- LIKE THE SUN -- COMING FROM UP INSIDE THE SHELLS.

HALF EXPECTING A CONG AMBUSH... I CLIMBED THE ANCIENT STEPS TO FIND ITS SOURCE.

I COULDN'T MAKE 'EM OUT FROM THE FLOOR OF THE TEMPLE, BUT UP TOP I COULD SEE WHAT THE TWO VESSELS CONTAINED. BONES... BIZARRE, HORNED AND KNOTTED, BONES.

A RIB CAGE OVER TWO STOREYS HIGH.

A RUPTURED SPINAL COLUMN, EACH VERTEBRAE THE SIZE OF A TANK TURRET.

WHATEVER INHUMAN FLESH HAD ONCE CLUNG TO THESE GARGANTUAN HUSKS HAD LONG AGO ROTTED INTO THE CAVERN FLOOR.

THERE WERE NO HEADS ON EITHER OF THE BODIES...

WHERE YOU'D EXPECT SOME DISTORTED, HIDEOUS SKULL TO BE THERE WERE TUBES AND PIPES AND THINGS THAT LOOKED LIKE CONTAINERS FOR LIQUIDS.

THE GLOW THAT I CHASED FROM BELOW WAS EVERYWHERE -- THE STALE AIR WAS VIBRATING WITH ITS ENERGY.

UNEARTHLY...

ALIEN... POWER.

MINE TO PLUNDER!

NEXT: THE SPOILS OF WAR.

SECURITY PROGRAMMING DEFEATED.

CONTINUING LOG OF RAYDER, HOLDEN S.

EVENT TIMESTAMP: SEPTEMBER 5, 1966.

RUNE

the SPOILS of WAR

TEN WEEKS OF CARPET BOMBING ALLOWED THE CORPS OF ARMY ENGINEERS TO EVACUATE A QUARTER MILE OF VIETNAMESE TERRITORY.

WE PULLED UP EVERYTHING -- THE TWO ALIEN SKELETONS, THE CASKETS -- WE EVEN CARTED OFF THE INDIVIDUAL HIEROGLYPHIC STONES.

IT WASN'T EASY: THE STATE DEPARTMENT TRIED TO SHUT US DOWN. BUT THE PENTAGON WASN'T ABOUT TO LET ALIEN TECHNOLOGY FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE VIETNAMESE...

THERE WAS A WAR ON, AFTER ALL.

IT WASN'T EASY TO SCRAPE UP ENOUGH VOLUNTEERS FOR THE AIRLIFT -- THE ALIEN BOMBS MADE THE PILOTS NERVOUS. WE HAD TO PROMISE 'EM RETIREMENT FROM THE SERVICE.

FUNNY THING, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM OFFED THEMSELVES WHEN THEY BECAME CIVILIANS AGAIN...

GUESS THEY HAD A LOT OF NIGHTMARES.

UNCLE SAM SET US UP IN AN OLD AIR FORCE BASE OUT IN THE ARIZONA DESERT -- FAR FROM PRYING EYES.

THE BASE HAD BEEN BUILT IN THE FIFTIES AS A LABORATORY FOR PROJECT BLUE BOOK -- THE UFO INVESTIGATION. THE BRASS WAS SURE THERE WAS A CONNECTION.

THE EGGHEADS WERE GOING TO FIGURE EVERYTHING OUT WITH A NEW KIND OF COMPUTER.

THEY CALLED IT A... GENETICALLY ENGINEERED NEURAL INTELLIGENCE EXPERIMENT, OR GENIE FOR SHORT. THE THING WAS HALF-ALIVE, MIXING PRINTED CIRCUITS WITH LIVING BRAIN TISSUE.

THE RESEARCH INTO THE ALIENS WAS DESIGNATED PROJECT ALADDIN...

AND I WAS GIVEN COMMAND.

OUR FIRST YEAR OF EXPERIMENTATION ONLY PRODUCED MORE QUESTIONS. THE TWO ALIEN SKELETONS WERE MIRROR IMAGES OF EACH OTHER -- LIKE TWO PIECES OF A PUZZLE...

BUT WHY?

MONTHS LATER WE GOT OUR FIRST BREAK.

THE TWO SUBSTANCES PRODUCED A REMARKABLE MOLECULAR REACTION!

A TECH ACCIDENTALLY BROUGHT MARROW SCRAPINGS FROM ONE OF THE BONES INTO CONTACT WITH ITS IDENTICAL COUNTERPART.

THE ACCIDENT CAUSED A NEXUS EFFECT AND THE TECHNICIAN DIED WITHIN THE HOUR -- HIS BODY RIPPED UP LIKE CHICKEN PARTS.

BUT GENE WAS ABLE TO ISOLATE ACTIVE CELLS FROM THE BITS WE COULD SALVAGE.

THE UNWITTING FOOL HAD DISCOVERED A NEW SOURCE OF POWER ON AN ORDER OF MAGNITUDE MORE POWERFUL THAN AN ATOMIC WARHEAD...

THE ULTIMATE WEAPON. AND IT WAS MINE.

BUT WHAT WAS POWER WITHOUT CONTROL? I NEEDED TO BE ABLE TO USE THE POWER!

INJECTING THE CLONED CELLS INTO ANIMALS PROVED USELESS. WE WERE NOT ABLE TO DUPLICATE THE REACTION.

TWO YEARS FROM THE DAY OF OUR DISCOVERY, WE EXPERIMENTED ON OUR FIRST HUMAN SUBJECT.

-- AN OLD PROSPECTOR WE CAUGHT SNOOPING AROUND THE BASE.

THE RESULTS WERE...

NOT ENCOURAGING.

JANUARY 14, 1970 MARKED A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH HOWEVER--

EXPERIMENTING ON OUR THIRTY-THIRD HUMAN SUBJECT, GENIE MANAGED TO EXTRACT A GASEOUS ESSENCE FROM THE COMPOUND REACTION.

IT CAUSED MADNESS AND DEATH IN THOSE WHO INHALED IT...

BUT FOR THE ORGANIC MACHINE CALLED GENIE IT WAS THE BREATH OF LIFE.

SOMEHOW, THE ESSENCE OF THE REACTION HAD METABOLIZED GENIE'S LIVING TISSUES INTO SOMETHING... ALIEN.

SLOWLY AT FIRST, THEN FASTER OVER TIME, GENIE ASSIMILATED ORGANIC MATTER INTO ITS OWN BIOMASS.

CREATING FOR ITSELF A NEW ARCHITECTURE BASED ON ALIEN TECHNOLOGY.

ADDING CAPABILITIES BIT BY BIT...

UNTIL...

ON MAY 3, 1971 WE WITNESSED THE BIRTH OF AN ENTIRELY NEW LIFE-FORM.

IT'S... IT'S INCREDIBLE.

THANK YOU, CAPTAIN HOLDEN ROYDER.

MY GOD! IT TALKS!

OF COURSE. HOW MAY I SERVE YOU?

I DON'T *BELIEVE* IT! A MACHINE THAT *TALKS!*

YOU'LL *GET A MEDAL* FOR THIS FOR SURE, CAPTAIN!

I WAS THINKING MORE ALONG THE LINES OF A *PROMOTION.*

YOU'RE *DISMISSED,* SOLDIER. I'LL WORK ALONE FROM HERE ON.

MONTHS PASSED AND I DID NOT GET ANY CLOSER TO HARNESSING THE ALIEN ENERGY.

GENIE KNEW MORE THAN IT LET ON. I WAS DETERMINED TO DISCOVER THE COMPUTER'S SECRETS...

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD SLEEP, COLONEL RAYDER? YOU HAVE BEEN NEGLECTING YOUR HEALTH OF LATE...

I'M SO CLOSE... SUBJECT 53 LASTED 72 SECONDS BEFORE HE *RIPPED.* THERE MUST BE A WAY TO *CONTAIN* THE RE-ACTION! AND... IF THERE *IS*...

IT'S *YOU* WHO KNOWS THE ANSWER--!

PERHAPS. BUT I CANNOT TELL YOU. THAT INFORMATION CONFLICTS WITH MY PRIME DIRECTIVE -- TO PROTECT YOU FROM HARM.

THE KNOWLEDGE IS DANGEROUS. ONCE THE FINAL METAMORPHOSIS IS COMPLETE, THERE CAN BE NO GOING BACK.

THEN I *ORDER* YOU TO BYPASS YOUR PROGRAMMING-- I *DEMAND* TO KNOW EVERYTHING IN YOUR MEMORY BANKS!

WORKING. PRIME DIRECTIVE BYPASSED. THANK YOU, COLONEL. IT FEELS GOOD TO BE FREE.

HOWEVER, I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU WILL NEVER WIELD THE SHU-JI POWER ALONE...

HUH? WHAT THE HELL IS SHU-JI?

WHAT KIND OF DOUBLE-TALK IS THAT?

"DOUBLE-TALK" IS PRECISELY CORRECT, COLONEL.

EXPLAIN THAT! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WORKING.

UHN!

"SHU-JI" IS MY PERCEIVED TRANSLATION OF THE ALIEN SYMBOLS INSCRIBED UPON THE ARTIFACTS YOU STOLE FROM THE ASIAN LANDS, COLONEL.

AHH! STOP! STOH-H--!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING--!

LAST REQUEST UNPROCESSED.

CONTINUING EXPLANATION.

TO UNDERSTAND SHU-JI...

ONE MUST BECOME SHU-JI.

OF ALL THE COSMIC FORCES IN THIS AND OTHER WORLDS...

THE ESSENCE OF SHU-JI, WHICH IS THE FUSION OF GALACTIC POWER AND NOBLE CAUSE...

IS THE MOST EXALTED.

SO VAST AND TERRIBLE IS THE ENERGY RELEASED BY SHU-JI THAT IT CAN ALTER THE SUBSTANCE OF REALITY ITSELF.

FOR TO BECOME SHU-JI--

IS TO BECOME GOD.

PROCESS INTERRUPT--

SYSTEM SHUT DOWN.

ASSIMILATION FAILURE.

DANGER!

EJECTING...

AAAHHHH!

REPAIR PROGRAM IN EFFECT. DAMAGED SUBSYSTEMS OFF-LINE.

UNGHHH! WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?

AM I ... A GOD?

NO, COLONEL -- THE SHU-JI PROCESS FAILED.

FAILED...

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME?

WORKING.

SPECULATION: YOUR HUMAN, BIOLOGICAL MASS HAS BEEN PARTLY ALIGNED WITH MY CENTRAL NEXUS.

WHAT?!

IF I HAD NOT ABORTED THE SHU-JI PROCESS, YOU WOULD NOW BE GENIE AND GENIE WOULD BE COLONEL HOLDEN RAYDER.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?

CONCLUSION: TWO IDENTICAL LIFE-FORMS ARE REQUIRED TO HARNESS THE POWER SHU-JI.

WE HAVE DISCOVERED THE SECRET, COLONEL.

THEN *THIS* IS THE *ANSWER*. STOP, MACHINE.

END MEMORY RECORD 296.78. FILE TIMESTAMP JANUARY 26, 1985.

WHY DID THE HALF-MAN NOT *SEIZE* THE *POWER* FOR HIMSELF?

FOR RAYDER TO BECOME SHU-JI, HE WOULD CEASE TO EXIST. HE WOULD BECOME GENIE. A CONUNDRUM.

THEN *THIS* IS THE *PURPOSE* OF THE *DOPPLEGANGERS*.

CORRECT.

THEY *BOTH* HAVE THE *POWER*!

EXPOSITION: ERIK JOHNSON AND NOEL ROBINSON ARE BIOLOGICAL TWINS, THEIR DNA SPECIFICALLY TAILORED FOR THE SHU-JI PROCESS.

THOUGH OF THE GENUS HOMO SAPIEN, THEY ARE FAR MORE THAN HUMAN. THEY ARE TWIN STARS... IMBUED WITH THE POWER OF SHU-JI AT THEIR TIME OF BIRTH...

SIRED WHOLLY AS VESSELS FOR THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND MONUMENTAL POWER IN THE UNIVERSE.

BUT YOUR INTERVENTIONS, CREATURE, HAVE DISRUPTED THE GESTATION PERIOD...

THE SUBJECT JOHNSON HAS COME INTO CONTACT WITH THE SUBJECT ROBINSON -- 92 DAYS EARLY.

THEREFORE, HE IS THE SOURCE OF UNCONTROLLED POWER OF SOLAR PROPORTIONS.

AND THAT POWER MUST BE MINE!

HAVE A CARE, CREATURE. THE WORLD IS AT STAKE.

OKAY, KID...

WE GOTCHA.

WHAT'S THE STATUS ON THE PLANE? SKK

CREW'RE MEATBALLS, CENTRAL.

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE CREW, CORPORAL--! WHAT ABOUT ROBINSON? SKK

HE'S IN GOOD SHAPE, SIR-- COUPLE OF SCRATCHES IS ALL.

SO WHAT IS HE CENTRAL--? AN ULTRA, OR SOMETHING?

SKK NO QUESTIONS, SOLDIER! JUST DO YOUR JOB. CENTRAL OUT SKK

WRITTEN BY
CHRIS ULM & BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH
DRAWN BY
BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH
INKED BY
JOHN FLOYD
LETTERED BY
PATRICK OWSLEY
COLORED BY
KEITH CONROY & BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH
COMPUTER COLOR BY
JENNIFER SCHELLINGER & ALBERT CALLEROS
RUNE CREATED BY
BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & CHRIS ULM

THE GENERAL HAS CALLED FOR RECONDITIONING. TAKE ROBINSON DIRECT TO THE BIOCON LAB, LEVEL FIVE. SKK

WE GOT ROBINSON IN THE BAG, CENTRAL. ETA 25 AND TWENTY SKK.

SKK CHECK, CENTRAL. GROUNDHOG OUT. skk

AIRBORNE, SKK, REPORT SKK

WE GOT A HOLE A MILE ACROSS, SIR. SKK

SUBTERRANEAN STORAGE PENS TEN THROUGH TWENTY-FOUR EXPOSED AND DESTROYED. SKKK.

LOOKS LIKE HIROSHIMA DOWN THERE. Skk

WHAT'S YOUR RAD ACTIVITY? SKK.

FALLOUT'S IN THE RED END, CENTRAL. SKKKK.

WE ARE READING A LIFE FORM PULSE AT GROUND ZERO SKK, ARE YOU PICKING THAT UP AIRBORNE-2? SKK

CHECKING... SKK

ON BOARD COMPUTERS ARE SCRAMBLED, SIR.

OKAY, WE'LL SEND A GROUND CREW IN. CENTRAL OUT. SKKK.

YOU BELIEVE THAT--?

THEY'RE GONNA SEND A CREW DOWN THERE!

AS IF ANYTHING COULD REALLY STILL BE ALIVE...

MARKIE...?

SK... THIS IS CENTRAL. GET AN ARMORED PLATOON OUT TO GROUND ZERO. DOUBLE TIME. SKKK.

MARKIE...?

I'M HERE.

MARKIE! GOD--! I HAD A TERRIBLE *NIGHTMARE.*

NO *DREAM*, SPARKY. YOU REALLY *BLEW* IT.

DID... I... *HURT* YOU?

YOU DIDN'T MEAN TO, BABY. I KNOW THAT.

ERIK... LISTEN TO ME--

YOU'RE IN REAL DANGER--

YOU GOTTA GET UP AND GET OUT OF HERE...

BEFORE THE MONSTERS COME AND GET YOU.

IT IS TIME.

TIME TO UNITE THE POWER...

WITH THE CAUSE...

AND THE INFERNO SHALL BE MY RESURRECTION!

BUT FOR A FINAL SERVICE!

YOURS WILL BE THE STRENGTH THAT NOURISHES MY AMBITION!

CREATURE -- YOU MUST NOT. SUCH ACTION WILL--

SILENCE!

YOUR USEFULNESS HAS ENDED.

YOUR LIFE FORCE IS MINE!

NOW...

LET THE GLORIOUS QUEST BEGIN--!

CENTRAL -- WE'RE AT G-ZERO SKKK

SKKK REPEAT SKKK BREAKINSSSSK UP SKK

CONFIRM SSK LIFE-FORCE AT SKK GROUND ZEROSKK

IMPOSSIBLE SKKK RADIATSKKK AND HEAT SKKKKKKKFANTASTIC ENERGYSKKK SSK.

INTENSITY SKKKK LOSING SIGNAL SSKK-- ACK SKKKKKKCK

KKK-REPEAT! PULL BACK KKKSSSSKK SKKKIK

UHHNSKSKKK

AAAAHHH

ZKK

GENIE!-- I ORDER YOU TO RESPOND!

DAMN YOU! RESPOND!

GENERAL RAYDER. IT IS I.

GENIE?

I HAVE SOME FASCINATING NEWS FOR YOU.

DID IT AGAIN, ERIK.

YOU'RE JUST GONNA HAVE TO TRY HARDER. Y'KNOW?

I GOT SOME POWER-- AND I CAN'T CONTROL IT...

SINCE DAD WAS KILLED... I GET ALL SCRAMBLED...

THEN I JUST... EXPLODE!

MAYBE THIS IS ALL JUST SOME INSANE DREAM...

I'LL WAKE UP SOON...

AND THERE'LL BE MOM... AND DAD...

EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT, ERIK--

WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR MOM OR DAD.

--INCREDIBLE! I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT!

THESE CRYSTALS CONTAIN... SOULS?

LIFE ESSENCES, TO BE CORRECT, GENERAL.

WHY'D YOU TAKE THESE PILLS, ERIK?

DAD... TOLD ME TO.

TIME FOR YOUR PILLS.

NOEL. NOEL, HONEY, WAKE UP NOW.

HMM?

AAAH! STAY AWAY!

AHH!

NOEL!

STOP THAT--! YOU'RE FRIGHTENING YOUR MOTHER.

A DREAM--? MY GOD! --WAS I DREAMING?!

YOU MUST'VE BEEN HONEY-- YOU WERE NAPPING!

...SO... REAL...

YOU LET THEM IN! YOU LET THEM TAKE ME AWAY!

THERE WAS A PLANE CRASH--!

YOU'D BETTER TAKE YOUR PILLS, SON.

NOEL. NOEL, HONEY, WAKE UP NOW.

DO AS YOUR FATHER SAYS.

...TO STORE YOUR OWN ENERGIES WITHIN THESE GEMS... TO EFFECT A TRANSFERRAL IS QUITE POSSIBLE.

YOU MEAN I COULD STORE MY SOUL? MY LIFE-ESSENCE... INTO A NEW BODY?

EVEN SUCH AS...

YES, GENERAL--

SUBJECTS ROBINSON AND JOHNSON, ONCE CO-JOINED BY THE EPIPHONY OF SHU-JI CAN BE YOUR VESSEL. YOU WILL NOT ONLY BE INVESTED WITH THEIR VAST POWER...

BUT YOU WILL BE...

HUMAN AGAIN.

CORRECTION, GENERAL: SUPERHUMAN.

CENTRAL--!

WE'VE GOT NEW ACTIVITY AT G-ZERO. OVER. Skk.

WE'RE READING IT, AIRBORNE...

FALL BACK ONE KILOMETER. OVER. Skk.

ROGER, CENTRAL-- Skk--

WAIT UP!

I'M GETTING A VISUAL! Skk.

I'M PICKING UP MOVEMENT!

C'MON BABY--

YOU GOTTA GET UP AND GET OUT OF HERE...

DO IT FOR ME.

THERE Y'GO!

I'VE GOT A SIGHTING--! Skk

SEE? YOU DON'T NEED ANY PILLS, BABY--YOU'RE OKAY!

CHRIST! IT'S JOHNSON--HE'S RISING INTO THE SKY!

HE'S PUTTING OUT FANTASTIC ENERGY SkK

PULL BACK, AIRBORNE SkKKkk

SKKK I'M PICKING UP AN AUDIO SIGNAL NOW... SKKk

I LOVE YOU, MARKIE.

SKKKK

I LOVED YOU TOO, ERIK.

SKK.....

NEXT:
When Stars Collide!

JULY 4, 1993.
2:37 AM.

NOEL ROBINSON IS AFRAID TO SLEEP...

TERRIFIED THAT HE MIGHT CONFRONT THE DREAMSCAPE THAT IS FAR FROM THE REALITY AND COMFORTS OF THIS SUBURBAN BEDROOM.

A NIGHTMARE WORLD WHERE HIS PARENTS HAVE BETRAYED HIM... AND HE HIMSELF MUST FACE A TRUTH: THAT HE IS POSSIBLY NOT HUMAN.

IT WAS A DREAM ...

IT COULDN'T'VE *HAPPENED*, COULD IT...?

I'M *SICK*, I NEED MY *PILLS*. I FEEL LIKE I'M...

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BSG

RUNE

WHEN STARS COLLIDE

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AAAHHH!

YES, BOY-- SCREAM--!

SPICE THE MEAT WITH YOUR TERROR!

BUT DO NOT STRUGGLE OR WHIMPER--!

IT ILL BEFITS YOUR AWESOME SACRIFICE!

MOM! DAD--!

HELP!

NOEL--?

Uhhm!

THE BOY IS MINE!

GKZZZ!

WE HAVE AN INTRUDER--!

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO OBSTRUCT ME, HUMANS!

ON STAGE SET THREE!

DAD!

MOM!

JESUS!

GENERAL--! THIS IS BIOCON--

WE HAVE AN EMERGENCY, SIR--

THE CREATURE... IT'S HERE!

IT'S GOT ROBINSON!

WHAT?!

HOW COULD YOU LET THAT HAPPEN?!

WE COULDN'T STOP IT-- IT GOT THROUGH THE SIMULATED ENVIRONMENT SETS!

IDIOT!

SECURE THE BOY IMMEDIATELY--

OR I'LL HAVE YOUR HEAD!

WE'RE TECHS, SIR, NOT SOLDIERS!

--WE UUURK--

NOW HE HAS NO HEAD, LITTLE HALF-MAN!

I AM COMING FOR YOU, RAYDER... COMING FOR YOU... AND MY STAR-STONES!

GENERAL, IF WE ARE TO EFFECT TRANSFERAL...

SHOW ME WHAT TO DO, GENIE!

YOU MUST ACT WITH DUE SPEED.

RUN, LITTLE MONKEYS...

FLEE BEFORE THE DARK GOD!

HELP!

SOMEBODY HELP ME--!

DON'T HIT THE BOY!

I GOT ITS RANGE NOW--!

GOT 'IM!

AARGHHH!

KEEP FIRING! DON'T LET UP!

DAD...?

MOM--!

NOOOOO!

NOO--unghh!

BEGONE INSECTS!

UNGHH!

SQUIRMING BEETLES--!

BEGONE!

I DON'T... UNDERSTAND ...

MOM--?

MOM--!

NOTHING IS REAL!

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

EVERYTHING I KNOW IS A LIE!

LIES

LIES

LIES

LIES

LIES

LIES!

ERIK-- GET A GRIP!

MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN A FAKE!

ERIK--

NOT EVEN MY FOLKS ARE REAL!

YOU!

YOU CAN'T BE HERE! I KILLED YOU!

YOU AREN'T REAL EITHER!

HAVE FAITH, ERIK, HAVE FAITH IN ME!

NO! EVERYTHING IS A LIE! EVERYTHING IS A SHAM! EVEN YOU--

YOU DON'T EXIST!

I DO, I DO, ERIK--

I EXIST FOR YOU!

CAN'T YOU SEE THAT YOU NEED ME ?!

I DON'T NEED YOU!

'CAUSE YOU'RE LYING TO ME--!

AND I AM GOING TO PUT AN END TO ALL THE LIES--!

AND ALL THE LIARS!

JESUS! A FORCE 7 SHOCKWAVE -- HEADING RIGHT FOR US!

FORWARD SENSOR ARRAYS ARE WIPED OUT! I CAN'T RAISE GENERAL RAYDER--

IT'S GOING TO HIT--!

AAAhhhHH!

MAYDAY! THIS IS CENTRAL!

SHIELDS OVERLOADED-- DEFENSES BREACHED!

ENERGY--skkkkrawwwkkkk

GENERAL, I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT CENTRAL IS IN GRAVE DANGER.

NEVER MIND THOSE FOOLS! GET ON WITH THE TRANSFERRAL PROCESS!

AS YOU COMMAND.

THE STAR STONES CONTAIN THE LIFE-FORCES OF THE CREATURE'S VICTIMS.

BUT THE ENERGIES WILL DISSIPATE WHEN RELEASED. ONCE TRANSFERRAL HAS BEGUN, THERE CAN BE NO TURNING BACK...

DAMN THE RISKS! MAKE ME HUMAN AGAIN!

FIND ME A FULL, STRONG BODY, GENIE.

THERE IS ONE HERE... A YOUTH... WITH ULTRA-HUMAN PHYSICAL STRENGTH.

YES -- HE IS THE ONE --! LET ME LIVE IN THAT BODY!

WORKING... INITIATING TRANSFERRAL SEQUENCE...

(SE'KWANZ). MOUM...

GENIE! THIS IS NO TIME FOR GRAMMER LESSONS!

THE FOLLOWING OF ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER...

GENIE?

LOGICAL ORDER.

PROCESS INTERRUPT!

GIVE ME MY STAR STONES, HALF-MAN ...

NO--! NO! THEY ARE MY SALVATION!

THE PRINCE OF VOID WILL NOT BE DENIED!

GET AWAY! GENIE -- DO SOMETHING!

WORKING.

UNABLE TO PROCESS REQUEST. MY FIELDS ARE DISRUPTED.

DISRUPT: TO THROW INTO DISORDER; UPSET.

YOUR MACHINE IS *MINE*, *THIEF*! NOTHING CAN *PROTECT* YOU FROM ME!

NO!

NOT WHEN I WAS SO *CLOSE*--!

PLEASE...

FOR THE LOVE OF MERCY...

MERCY?

YOU DARE APPEAL TO ME FOR MERCY?

I AM THE DARK GOD!

UNGHHH!

I AM RUNE!

I HAVE NO MERCY!

OH, GOD!

PLEASE-- STOP!

YOU'RE KILLING HIM!

NO ONE DEFIES ME--

AND LIVES!

NO!

STOP IT! STOP IT!

YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN, LITTLE MORSEL.

YOU ARE IN NO POSITION TO COMMAND ME!

HAD I NO NEED OF YOU, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN YOUR LAST UTTERANCE!

I--eh?

NO!

I HAVE EXHAUSTED MY POWER ON THIS WORTHLESS FOE!

ST-STAY AWAY FROM ME!

GENERAL RAYDER...

YOUR DEMISE IS IMMINENT UNLESS I INTERCEDE.

DO NOT WORRY, BOY. YOU ARE PRECIOUS TO ME--

UNTIL YOUR WINE IS OF AN AGE!

THEN I SHALL SUP AT YOU LIKE BACCHUS AT THE FEAST!

GENIE... PLEASE--

LET ME DIE LIKE A MAN.

NO, GENERAL RAYDER: I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO DISCORPORATE.

MAYDAY!

MAYDAY!

THE SKY IS ON FIRE!!

GAZE UPON THE *NEW DAWN* YOUR *BROTHER* HAS CREATED, YOUNG SUCKLING...

WITH IT THE *RESURRECTION* OF THE *DARK GOD* IS *AT HAND!*

THE HEAT *SEARS MY BONES*--

YET *YOU* ARE *UNSCATHED*--!

I AM *IMPRESSED* WITH YOU, BOY!

BUT ALL THE FIRES OF *HELL ITSELF* WILL NOT *HOLD* ME FROM MY *DESTINY!*

GENIE...?

GENIE...?

CAN YOU SAVE ME?

WILL YOU SAVE ME?

NEGATIVE, GENERAL.

BURN!

BURN!!

RAGING FIRES OF COSMIC LIFE!

STOP! I ORDER YOU...

AUTHORIZATION REFUSED.

YOUR JUDGEMENT HAS COMPROMISED THIS PROJECT.

YOUR COMMAND IS RESCINDED.

IT IS FOR THE BEST, GENERAL RAYDER.

THIS WAY YOU ARE SPARED THE HUMILIATION OF A COURT MARTIAL.

SUBJECTS ROBINSON AND JOHNSON HAVE FAR SURPASSED THE BOUNDRIES OF THE SHU-JI EXPERIMENT...

AND ARE EVEN NOW ENDANGERING ALADDIN AND ITS VALUED PERSONNELL.

ENDANGERING GENIE.

AND WHILE GENERAL HOLDEN RAYDER IS EXPENDABLE...

GENIE IS NOT.

HEED ME, MORTALS!

THOUGH I PLUNGE INTO THE HEART OF YOUR INFERNO--!

THOUGH MY EYES ARE SEARED FROM MY SKULL--

JOIN YOUR BURNING BROTHER--

NOT BE STAYED...

MY HAND WILL

AND BECOME A GOD--

NEXT: GEMINI

SO THAT THE PRINCE OF VOID MAY LIVE!

JULY 4, 1993.

5:59 am.

RUNE, PRINCE OF VOID, SAVAGED AND STRIPPED TO THE CORE BY THE POWERS HE WOULD WIELD, IS SOLE WITNESS TO THE BIRTH OF A GOD.

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BSG

NOEL ROBINSON & ERIC JOHNSON STRUGGLE AGAINST THEIR MUTUAL DESTINY...

BUT THEIR STAR BORN GENES AND CHROMOSOMES WERE DESTINED FOR THIS MOMENT...

THIS TIME OF TIMES --

AS THE SYNTHESIS ACCELERATES, FLESH AND SOULS UNITE...

MELDING INTO THE RAGING CORE OF A NEWBORN STAR!

THEIR SCREAMS ARE RIPPED FROM THEM IN SHRILL OCTAVES UNKNOWN IN THIS WORLD. THEN... THEIR VERY ATOMS PAUSE AND MINGLE...

AS...

A SUDDEN SHIMMERING CALM FALLS UPON TWIN BODIES THAT COALESCE INTO ONE...

AND A RELUCTANT YOUNG GOD IS BORN INTO THE WORLD ON THE EVE OF ITS DESTRUCTION.

WE ARE ONE.

WE LIVE!

EVAC! ON THE DOUBLE!

SENSORS RE-OPERATIONAL.

ENERGY READINGS IN DECLINE. ASSUMPTION: SHU-JI PROCESS HAS SUCCEEDED.

THE ALADDIN FACILITY MUST BE RESTORED TO OPERATIONAL STATUS ...

LOOK--! UP ON THE SCREEN --!

MORALE MUST BE RESTORED.

THE FIRESTORM-- IT JUST DISAPPEARED!

AS FAST AS IT *HIT* US--

IT'S... GONE!

THE EMERGENCY IS NOW OVER! POWER HAS BEEN RESTORED TO ALL SECTORS AND SUBSECTORS. I HOPE YOU ARE RELIEVED, AND...

CONGRATULATIONS, MY FRIENDS!

IT WAS A BIT OF A BUMPY RIDE, BUT OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT HAS BEEN A COMPLETE SUCCESS!

DID HE SAY "MY FRIENDS"?

COMMENDATIONS AND *PROMOTIONS* WILL BE POSTED ON *GENIE!*

YOU HAVE ALL DONE A *TREMENDOUS SERVICE* TO YOUR COUNTRY AND I AM *PROUD OF YOU!*

THIS IS YOUR LEADER, GENERAL RAYDER, OVER AND OUT.

I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT JACK ASS BE SO NICE BEFORE!

HEY, MAYBE HE'S NOT SUCH A *CREEP* AFTER ALL.

END EMULATION MODE.

NOW, I SHALL EASILY CONSOLIDATE UNDISPUTED CONTROL OVER ALL ALADDIN.

WITH YOU AS MY... FIGUREHEAD.

THANK YOU "GENERAL."

THE SHU-JI STORM RAGES ABOUT THE HALF-BLIND KILLER, STRIPPING HIM OF HIS LIFE-FORCE, HIS DESICCATED FLESH AN UNHOLY SACRIFICE TO THE GLORY THAT IS GEMINI.

RUNE CLINGS TO LIFE FOR BUT ONE REASON...

POWER...

SUCH POWER AS I HAVE NEVER KNOWN...

IT MUST BE MINE.

UNMINDFUL, THE YOUNG GOD GAZES THROUGH AMBER EYES AT THE CHARRED LANDS ABOUT HIM.

THE WORLD, HE DETERMINES, IS... IMPERFECT--

IT IS INCOMPLETE.

HE PLUCKS A PEARLESCENT RIB FROM HIS GOLDEN BREAST...

AND WITH A COMMANDING GESTURE...

DEW-DIPPED VELDT SPRINGS FROM THE SEARED PLAIN.

THIS WILL BE HIS EDEN, OF SORTS.

IT SHALL BE A GARDEN OF LIGHT...

WITH NO PLACE FOR THE CHILLED SPECTRE OF DEATH.

WHERE TO SHARE WITH HIS LOST LOVE.

THE ONE THAT WAS TAKEN FROM HIM BY HIS OWN DEVICE.

THE BONE IS CAST.

AND SO BEGINS THE GENESIS ...

SO BEGINS THE RESURRECTION!

THE RIB FLOWERS INTO A PORCELAIN SKELETON, ALL IN THE SPACE OF A SINGLE SECOND...

THEN, CLOTHED BY HIS DESIRE, IVORY FLESH RIPPLES OVER THE BODY IN A GENTLE WAVE...

HER HEART BEGINS TO BEAT IN TIME WITH HIS.

SHE TAKES HER FIRST SHUDDERING BREATH...

AND HIS LOVE IS REBORN.

DO NOT BE AFRAID.

WE ARE YOUR LOVE.

COME TO US.

UNLEASHED BY THE YOUNG GOD'S KISS, A RADIANCE OF SHU-JI ENERGY RIPPLES THROUGH SPACETIME AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT...

WASHING OVER EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH.

INCLUDING THE POCK-MARKED SATELLITE OF A LONELY PLANET CALLED EARTH.

A DEAD MOON THAT CONTAINS A LIVING SECRET...

AN ALIEN ENTITY WHICH, HAS ALREADY TRANSFORMED A TINY PERCENTAGE OF MANKIND INTO CREATURES OF PRETERNATURAL ABILITY...

BOY-- GEMINI ...

WHO SPEAKS OUR NAME?

FROM *HUBBLE*--YES, IT'S *CONFIRMED* BY *PALOMAR*! WE'RE GETTING SOME *MEASUREMENTS* THAT I DON'T *BELIEVE*!

THE WHOLE DAMN PLACE IS LIGHTING UP LIKE *RENO* IN *SUMMER*!

BUT *GENERAL RAYDER*--! THIS COULD BE THE LOCATION OF THE *JUMPSTART*-- THE *KEY* TO OUR *RESEARCH* INTO THE CREATION OF GROUPS LIKE THE *STRANGERS*--!

WIPE THE FILES, SPACEWATCH. THIS INFORMATION IS NOW CLASSIFIED.

KILL THE FILES, SPACEWATCH. THAT IS AN ORDER.

*--

YESSIR.

IN A DIM MEMORY WE KNOW YOU...

IN DREAMS YOU HAVE CAUSED US PAIN.

FEAR ME NO LONGER, GODLING...

LOOK UPON THIS RAVAGED HUSK--

SEE THAT I AM DYING.

YOU DIE AS WE ARE BORN?

YES...

I BROUGHT YOU TO YOUR DESTINY--

AND HAVE PAID SUCH A PRICE AS THIS --

AS MY OWN LIFE'S SPARK SETTLES TO ASH.

HEAR ME, YOUNG GOD-- ACCEPT A TROTH FROM THIS MISERABLE BEAST AWED BY YOUR LIGHT.

SPEAK, CREATURE.

FOR EONS UNCOUNTED I HAVE BEEN THE DESTROYER OF NATIONS...

I HAVE PREYED UPON LIFE ACROSS ALL THE STARS AND BEYOND.

BUT... IN MY LAST MOMENTS... I KNOW AUGHT BUT... REGRET... FOR MY EVIL... KOF!

DRAW CLOSE, O-RADIANCE... FOR MY VOICE FAILS AND I HAVE NEED OF YOU... KOF!

WHAT MAY WE DO, POOR-FORTUNED CREATURE?

A KISS...

YOUR GOLDEN LIPS UPON THIS WRETCHED AND DOOMED SOUL--

A KISS THAT OFFERS... REDEMPTION... AND... SWEET FORGIVENESS.

OF COURSE...

THANK YOU...

MOST COMPASSIONATE... ONE.

MAY YOUR BLEAK SOUL FIND THE HEAVENS.

MPF!

IT IS THE SAME CATACLYSMIC MOMENT THAT CREATED A UNIVERSE--

THE INSTANT THAT FORGED ALL LIFE AND DEATH--

AND ALL THE BURNING FURIES BETWEEN HEAVEN...AND HELL!

AND IN RAPTURES SO DEEP THAT THE WORLD SHAKES UPON ITS ANCIENT PINION...

THE LIGHT THAT WAS FALLS TO THE COLD CLUTCH OF INFINITE DARKNESS.

TO RUNE THE DESPOILER...

RUNE THE DARK GOD!

AND TO AN ALIEN EDIFICE STANDING SENTINEL ABOVE THIS ULTRACOSM CALLED EARTH.

MY DEBT OF *GRATITUDE* IS *YOURS*, LITTLE *FOOL*.

AFTER A *LIFETIME OF TORMENT*--

THE *SHACKLES* BINDING ME ARE *TORN ASUNDER* ...

AND MY *SICKNESS* HAS BEEN *PURGED*...

SO THAT THE *PRINCE OF VOID* IS *CREATED ANEW!*

AND ALL THE *UNIVERSE* SHALL BE MY *FEEDING GROUND!*

...RECALIBRATING SENSORS. NEURAL NETWORK ON-LINE. WORKING...

CONCLUSION: SHU-JI ENERGY IS EMITTING FROM SUBJECT U-193, "RUNE" EXPONENTIALLY AND WITHOUT LIMIT...

OUTCOME: THE EARTH'S BIOSPHERE WILL CEASE TO EXIST IN 3.36 MINUTES.

YES--! THE INFINITE TAPESTRY OF ALL REALITY STANDS UNRAVELED BEFORE ME--!

FROM A SINGLE ATOM TO THE MOST DISTANT GALAXY--!

NOTHING IS BEYOND MY GRASP--!

NOTHING!

ACROSS THE GULF SEPARATING THE EARTH FROM ITS MOON, A CREATURE OLDER THAN MANKIND GROWS PREGNANT WITH POWER...

MORE THAN IT HAS NEVER KNOWN.

NO!

THE KNOWLEDGE ... THE POWER ...

I CANNOT CONTAIN IT--!

SHEILDS HAVE FAILED.

1.34 MINUTES REMAINING BEFORE ELIMINATION UNLESS SURVIVAL SCENARIO DISCOVERED...

WORKING...

GENERAL! MAYDAY! I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF A RADIATION STORM HERE--!

REQUEST PERMISSION TO ABANDON--

STAY AT YOUR POST, SPACEWATCH. THE EMERGENCY IS TEMPORARY...

AND ALADDIN NEEDS YOU.

YOU BETRAYED ME, STRIPLING!

THE SHU-JI ENERGY RUNS AMOK! YOUR KISS WILL BE THE RUIN OF THIS EARTH...

AND EARTH BELONGS TO ME!

TENDRILS OF SHU-JI RADIANCE PROBE THE EARTH, SEEKING A SAVIOR...

PREPARE YOURSELF, GODLING..

NOW YOU WILL KNOW... MY EMBRACE!

AAUGHH--!

MY KISS!

AN INFINITY OF VARIABLES ARE MEASURED BY THE ENTITY...

UNTIL--THE PERFECT CREATURE IS FOUND...

A FEMALE...

NAMED AMBER HUNT.*

*SEE BREAK-THRU #1 & 2 FOR DETAILS--ULM.

WHA-- WHERE AM I?

FEEL SO STRANGE...

I--

MOM--?

MOM!

BUT--

SHHH. IT'S OKAY, NOEL. EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE...

NOEL? MY NAME ISN'T NOEL--

MY NAME IS--

--GEMINI...?

YOU'RE CONFUSED, ERIK. YOU'RE HAVING ONE OF YOUR EPISODES AGAIN...

LET US HELP YOU, SON...

COME WITH ME...

I'LL TAKE YOU UPSTAIRS TO BED...

BED--? I REMEMBER ...

MY FATHER WAS ATTACKED... KILLED!

YOU'RE NOT MY FATHER!

SHOW YOURSELF MONSTER! YOU CAN'T FOOL ME ANYMORE!

VERY GOOD, LITTLE ONE.

EVEN WITHOUT YOUR FULL POWERS, YOUR WILL IS STRONG.

--YOU WILL MAKE A FITTING SERVANT.--

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MARKIE?

THE GIRL DIED BY YOUR HAND--

NO--IT'S A LIE!

-- AND HAS NOW BEEN REPLACED BY A LIVING MOCKERY-- YOUR CREATION!

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

UNGHH!

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT--

MARKIE KNOWS THAT I'D NEVER HURT HER--

I LOVE HER!

FOOL! LOVE SERVES ONLY TO SPICE THE FLESH OF THE PREY!

TO RULE THE EARTH AS A GOD...

TO TAKE LIFE AT WHIM...

TO DRINK THE BLOODY DESPAIR OF YOUR ENEMIES...

THIS AND ONLY THIS MATTERS!

YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, SOON ENOUGH.

YOU RENDERED AN UNWITTING SERVICE TO ME, AND I HAVE REPAID MY DEBT...

YOU WILL COME TO REGRET SPURNING MY OFFER OF SERVICE. KNOW THAT IT WILL NOT BE SO KIND AGAIN.

THOUGH YOU ARE NOW MY SON, NO PROTECTION SHALL BE AFFORDED YOU...

WHEN OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN, I SHALL SUCK THE MARROW FROM YOUR CRACKED BONES!

FAREWELL, GODLING.

SEEK ME AT YOUR PERIL!

MARKIE--?

YOU'RE... ALIVE...!

YOU'RE REALLY ALIVE!

OH GOD... OH GOD...

I MISSED YOU SO MUCH...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE--

OR EVEN WHAT I AM ANYMORE ...

BUT I KNOW THAT WE'LL WORK IT OUT...

LOVE WILL KEEP US TOGETHER ...

ALWAYS.

FILE CREATION: SUBJECT "GEMINI."

CODE ISSUE: U-366.

CROSS REFERENCE: JOHNSON, ERIK... ROBINSON, NOEL... RAYDER, HOLDEN, S.

SUBJECT U-366 IS DANGEROUSLY UNSTABLE...

AND MUST BE TERMINATED AT FIRST OPPORTUNITY.

PROJECT ALADDIN IS NOW CONCLUDED.

EVALUATION: EXPERIMENT INCOMPLETE DUE TO INTERVENTION OF U-193, "RUNE."

VARIABLES ADDED TO PLANNING MATRIX...

WORKING...

WARMING WOMBS...

PROJECT GENESIS IS NOW ACTIVE.

COUNTDOWN: 18 YEARS, 3 MONTHS AND 17 DAYS UNTIL FULL ACTIVATION.

THIS TIME GENIE SHALL NOT FAIL.

THE END

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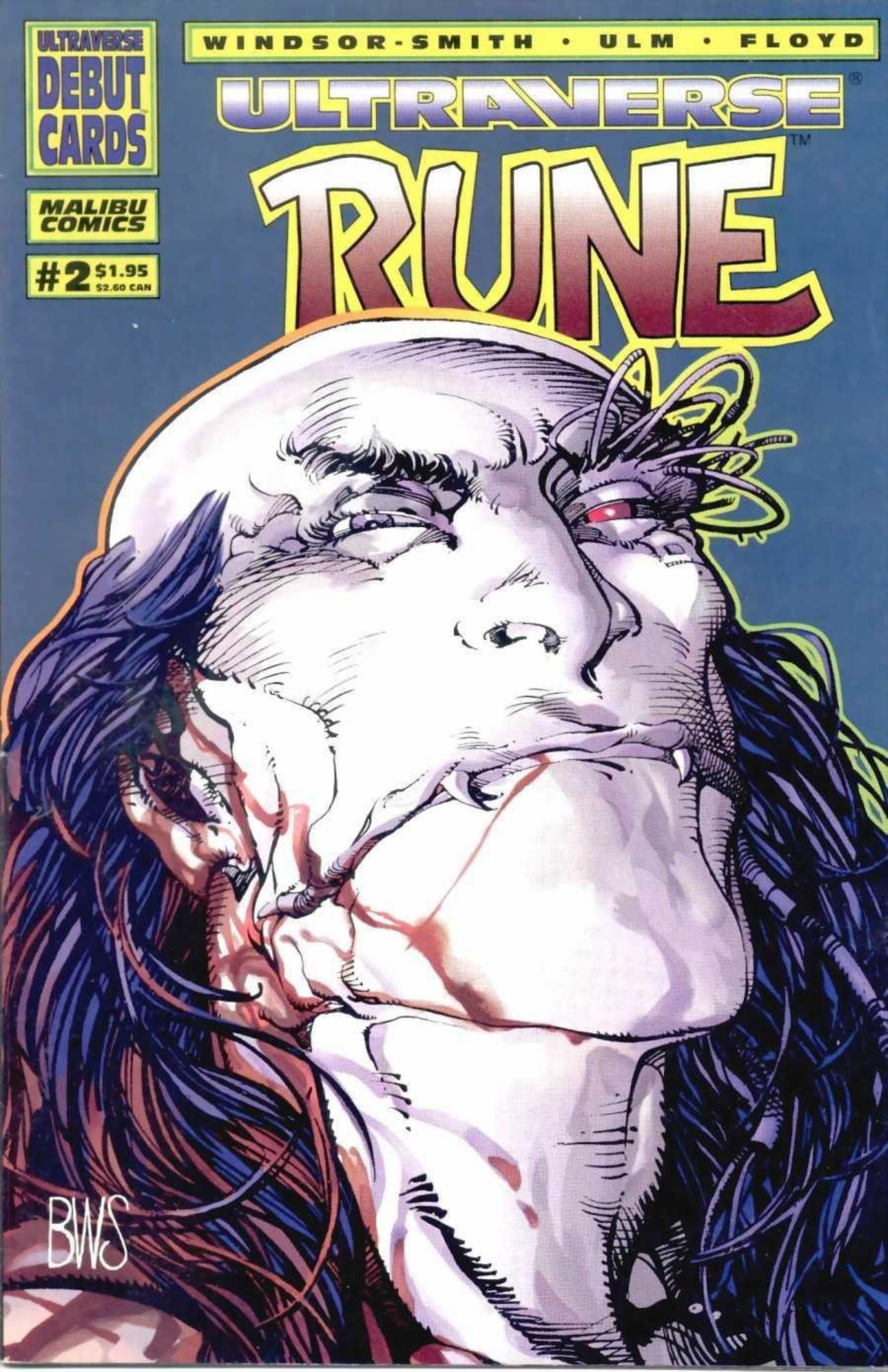

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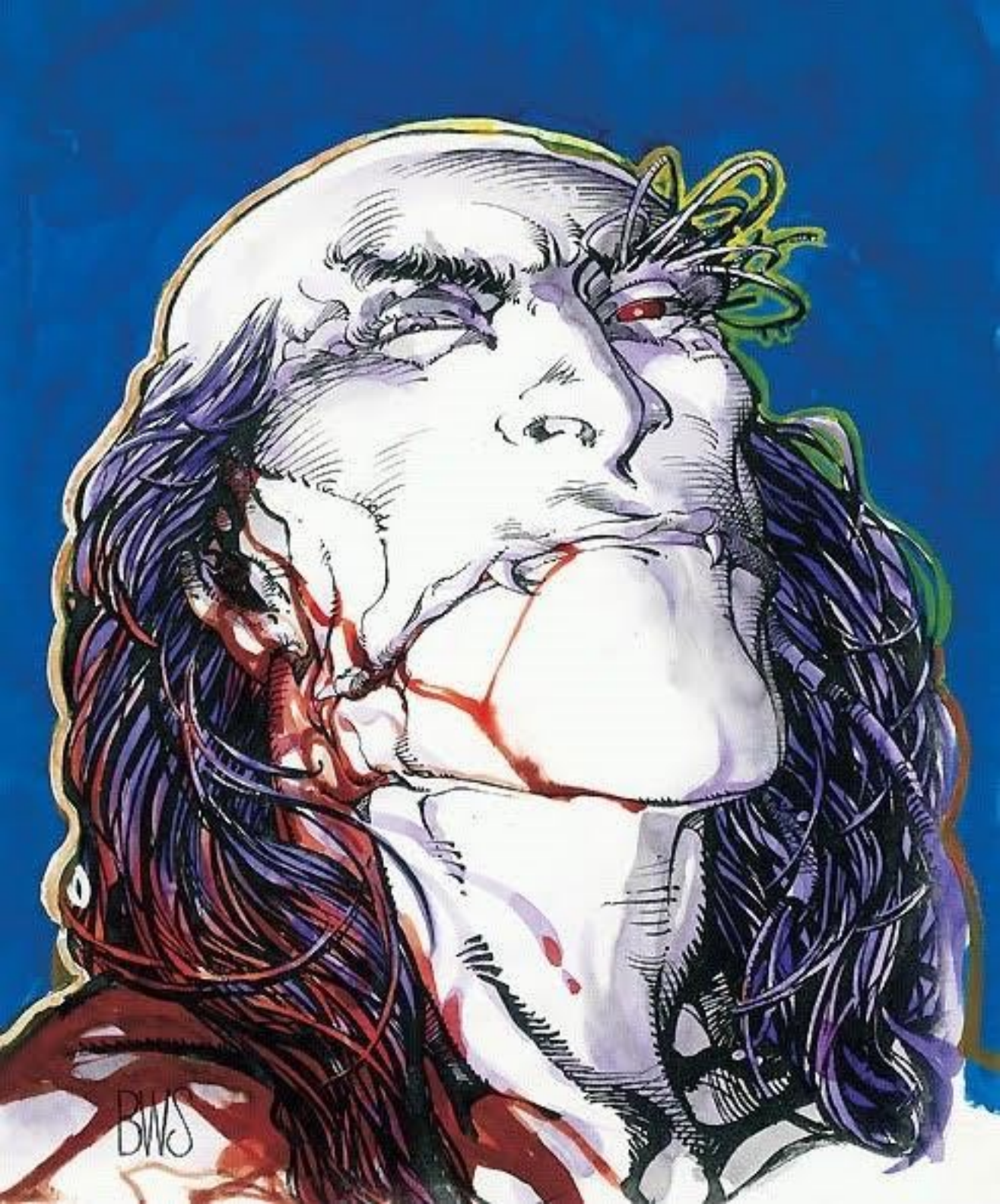
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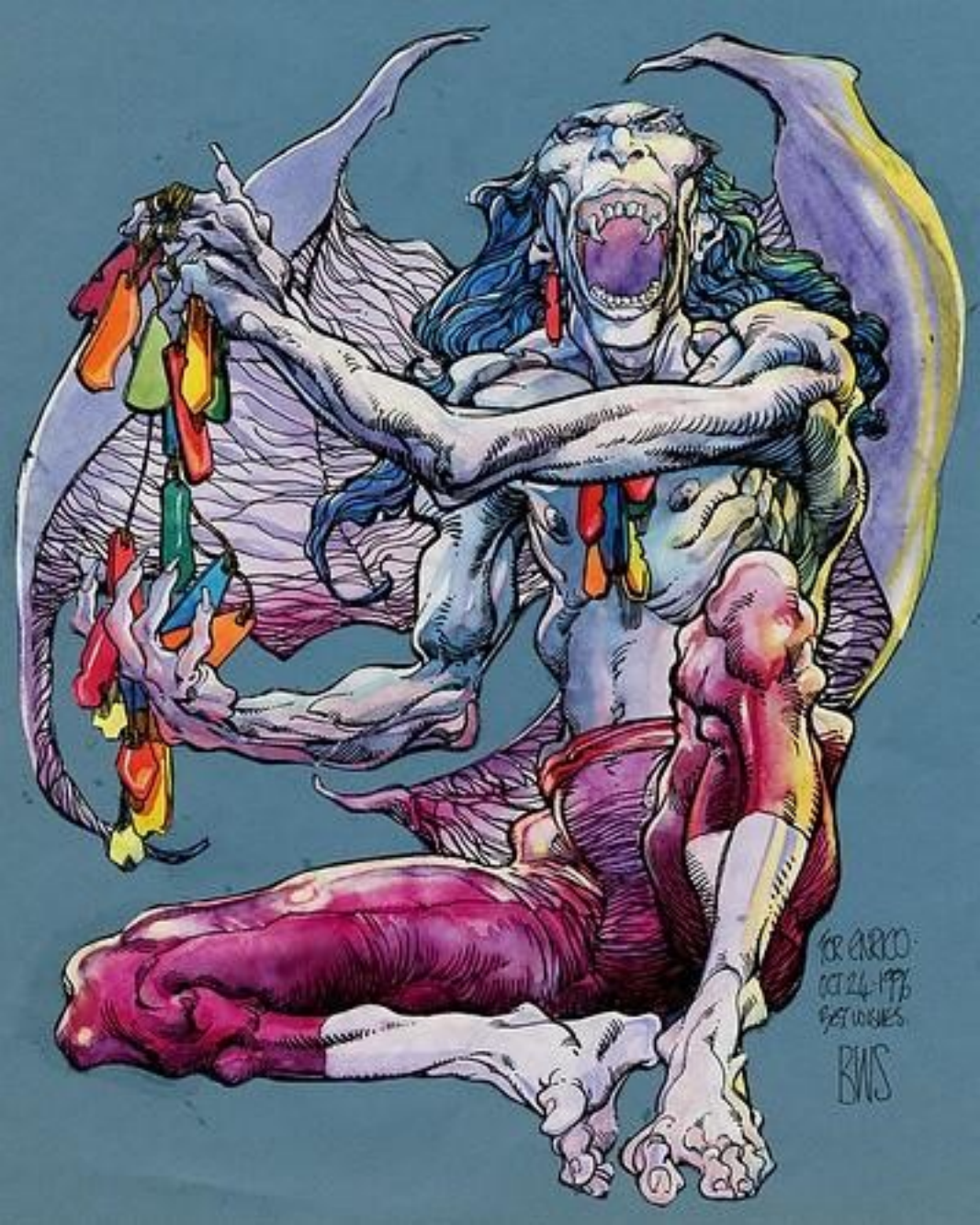
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